

Searching for the political soul of Communist China is not an endeavor for the impatient. Those prospecting for certainty and fact will find themselves surrounded by ambiguity, sabotaged by enigma and haunted by frustration. But there are times when the hundreds and hundreds of pages of tiresome, repetitious and inexorably dull propaganda assume an entirely fresh relevance to the world of today. These are the times when the shadow of the Middle Kingdom becomes a silhouette and then, for just a brief moment, a full profile - something an outsider can grasp, can understadd, can comprehend. One of these unique occasions is October the first.

October the first is the day when Communist China prostrates itself in a massive display of veneration and adoration for its "great teacher, great leader, great supreme commander and great helmsman," Chairman Mao Tse-tung. October the first is also the day when Communist China goes on parade to celebrate its burdens, its triumphs and its independence. Above all, this is China's National Day: the day when this vast and proud Communist nation puts on the most majestic spectacle on this earth.

For the China Watcher in Hong Kong, National Day produces a series of conflicting emotions. Initially, there is a sense of

relief and liberation from the routine drudgery as China transforms itself from an inanimate printed page into thousands and thousands of marching feet and shouting voices. But gradually a feeling of exhilaration sets in only to be rudely crushed by the inevitable return of sobriety and frustration at being merely an eavesdropper on the excitement and drama from Tienanmen Square in Peking.

The day officially begins at 10 a.m. when everything stops for just a few brief seconds until the sound of trumpets echoing from dozens of loudspeakers in Tienanmen fills the airwaves between Peking and Hong Kong. As the trumpets are replaced by the military airs of The East is Red, a female announcer for Radio Peking breathlessly takes over the microphones to provide the official account of the proceedings. "All have been resolved to win the struggle of criticism and repudiation," she proclaims, "and to win in production as in revolution." Just as she finishes, the huge crowds begin to applaud ecstatically and shout "Long Live our Great Leader Chairman Mao". The ovation continues until the announcer breaks in to confirm that Chairman Mao and the other top leaders had indeed made their appearance on the rostrum and that the Chairman is in military uniform looking in "excellent health" - as always. But she is gradually drowned out by the masses as they hysterically chant the litany over and over and over again. "Long Live Chairman Mao. Long Live. Long Live. Ten Thousand Years to Chairman Mao. A long long life to Chairman Mao. Long Live. Long Live."

The cries go on and on rising in a furious crescendo as each group tries to outdo the other in declaring their love for Chairman Mao. Occasionally one group will go hoarse so another will pick up the chant continuously filling the Square with the rhythms of Maoism. And it is the exuberant rhythms of this day that are unforgettable, not the melodies which have become too familiar through daily repetition. On National Day, Tienanmen explodes with thousands of voices and it often seems that all of China's 750 million have converged on the Square to join the chorus. "Chairman Mao, Chairman Mao, Long Live Chairman Mao." Faster and faster the chant becomes, drowning out any competition; irresistible and bizarre in its attraction.

Even 1,500 miles away in Hong Kong, the mind and the senses rebel against the sound of Tienanmen with cynicism and incredulity. China is normally a one-dimensional object for the outside world like so many words on a printed page. But here, incredible as it often seems to those outside, are the real people actually speaking those words. True, Mao says not a word, for as always, on National Day he is silent. But there is the voice of Lin Piao. On paper his words come out flat and undistinguished. "Comrades and friends," he begins his October One address, "The great People's Republic of China founded and led personally by our great leader Chairman Mao Tse-tung...." But in real life the impression is totally different. In a hoarse and strongly nasal voice with an obvious peasant accent, Lin Piao almost squeaks into the microphones as the hard syllables

of the Mandarin dialect run off his tongue. Each word is pronounced carefully in order to gain maximum effect and bring the huge audience to attention. Yet there is barely any sign of passion in his voice until he reaches the second line of his speech when he literally shouts "our great leader Chairman Mao Tse-tung" providing the cue for a long and enthusiastic round of applause and cries from the masses in the Square.

It is perhaps impossible for anyone who has not wrestled daily with the enigma of China to appreciate the illusion created by the Tienanmen festivities. For in this brief moment it becomes possible to overlook the enigma and concentrate on the spectacle. The impact of the spectacle is so strong that it totally dominates the senses, and it is only afterwards when the shouts and the cheers of the crowds have died away that the enigma returns and China is again shrouded in mystery and words - above all, those thousands of printed words.

By late afternoon on October the first, the words begin to accumulate in the form of descriptive commentary of the day's events, the major speeches and the important editorials. Most of this ritualistic verbiage is sometimes barely tolerable, even on October the first, but some of it is significant, often for the most obscure reasons. In many cases, what is not said will be far more important than what is said, which turned out to be the case in 1968.

To Stanley Karnow of the Washington Post it seemed most important that Vietnam was obviously downgraded as a critical issue

for Communist China and almost ignored at the festivities. As Karnow wrote in his account of the 1968 National Day, Lin Piao's speech had wasted few words on emphasizing Chinese support for the Vietnam War.

"The Chinese Communists have significantly downgraded their expressions of support for North Vietnam and the Vietcong while displaying increased concern at the possibility of a clash with the Soviet Union... Speaking at this morning's rally in Peking, Lin Piao pointedly omitted any reference to the Vietnam conflict..."

Karnow also noted that the celebrations had made clear the slowdown of the Cultural Revolution would continue, while Charles Mohr of the New York Times pointed out how this had been symbolically reflected in the new uniforms of the Red Guards.

"This year the Red Guards, who virtually dominated Peking rallies two years ago, carried sashes of the color symbolic of the workers - blue as a tangible symbol of their ideological subjugation."

Mohr added that this growing trend of moderation was confirmed not only in the lower status assigned to the Red Guards but also in Marshal Lin Piao's speech.

"The speech was viewed here as another indication that Mr. Mao has been persuaded to slow down the Cultural Revolution, which has brought much chaos, disruption and violence."

Robert Elegant took that analysis one step further in his report to the Los Angeles Times.

"Speaking in a hesitant voice that reflected either exhaustion or illness, Vice Chairman Lin Piao of the Communist Party today affirmed that China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution had already ended."

But this was only the beginning of the dissection of every bit of information that would become available of the National Day festivities. John Gittings in the weekly Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review noted, perhaps on a more esoteric level, that Lin Piao's speech was:

"... curiously flat and wooden in tone...much shorter than his speech at the National Rally last year, less explicit on its praise for the achievements of the Cultural Revolution and unimaginative in its use of adjectives."

Gittings also observed that great emphasis was placed in the official accounts on the national minorities of China, such as the Tibetans or the Mongolians and on the role they played in the festivities. This perhaps suggested that the minorities in some of the persistently troublesome provinces would receive better treatment, but that of course was a question that had no conclusive answer.

There were other questions that would also be left unanswered once the namelists became available of the leaders present on the reviewing stand at Tienanmen. These namelists are the only reliable indicators of the ranking of the Chinese leadership and in 1968 there were only minor changes. Mao, of course, still topped the list, followed by Lin Piao and Premier Chou En-lai. But the namelists were withheld for nearly 36 hours after the event. Why? Even more perplexing was the absence of any photographs of the rostrum weeks after the event took place. The People's Daily, the official Communist Party newspaper published in Peking, showed pictures of the paraders and the huge crowds but only a long distance shot of the

rostrum so that no individual faces could be distinguished. Why? On National Day itself Peking Television had broadcast the event live and had presumably shown shots of the rostrum. Yet as one week and then another week went by, crews of both CBS and NBC monitoring Canton Television from a hilltop in Hong Kong's New Territories waited in vain for any film of the National Day Festivities. But for reasons that may never be known and can only be guessed at, Canton Television broadcast not a foot of film showing the rostrum at Tienanmen. Again, why?

There is no end to the "whys" in watching Communist China. Why, for example, did the Maoists suddenly slow down the upheaval in Communist China and put the Red Guards out to pasture? Why, for that matter, did Mao even start the Cultural Revolution? Or was it Mao? Could it have been his driving, ambitious wife, Chiang Ching?

Speculating on the answers to some of these questions is the major preoccupation for a group of diplomatic analysts, journalists and academic researchers who make up the China Watching Community of Hong Kong. The community is not large and certainly no more than 150-200 people in this tiny British Crown Colony make their living from the sport. The number of people who actually do the hard analysis is much smaller, probably in the neighborhood of 50-100. In some ways the community could be compared to a constellation emanating from the U.S. Consulate, the Japanese Consulate and the British Foreign Office to the offices of no more than a dozen well-paid, individualistic, occasionally temperamental journalists. The nucleus of the press group includes such men as Stanley Karnow of

the Washington Post, Robert Elegant of the Los Angeles Times, Tillman Durdin of The New York Times, Peter Kumpa and Edward Wu of the Baltimore Sun, Sydney Liu of Newsweek, Bruce Nelan of Time Magazine, John Gittings of the Far Eastern Economic Review and Father LaDany, the durable and scholarly commentator who writes the China News Analysis. By almost any standard, these diplomatic analysts and journalists more than earn their salaries in the course of surviving constant attacks of frustration and tedium - the major occupational hazards of the profession.

Together these two afflictions are such a formidable combination that even the best of reporters have despaired of covering China adequately - within the present limitations. John Hughes of the Christian Science Monitor, for example, is a Pulitzer Prize winner who finds the hot and humid meteorological and political climate of Djakarta in some ways more inviting than the ivory-towered air-conditioned existence in Hong Kong where he makes his home. "China Watching is terribly frustrating and boring. You can't see China. You can't feel it. And you can't touch it. Everything is second-hand. Of course I try to keep up with the reading matter, but I never do. And usually if I don't have anything else to do, I crank out a few China pieces. But personally, I will be far more interested in China when I get to see it. When that day will come has always been one of the more intriguing guessing games played by all who watch China, and like everything else in this profession there are no sure answers. So for the foreseeable future, at any rate, most of

the outside world will continue to find itself in the unenviable position of relying on the Peking Government as its major source of news on Communist China.

The Chinese have endeavored to satisfy this virtually insatiable demand for information - with a vengeance - in the form of the New China News Agency (NCNA). This institution is not only the basic source for the China Watching Community but also the greatest single producer of tedium, in a world filled with it. What makes the NCNA even more irritating is that there is so much of it - about 30,000 words per day. This amounts to page after page of tired repetitions and usually monotonous propaganda written in a style that the Rand Corp. has very politely termed "esoteric communications." And unlike the Western press which recognizes some responsibility for entertaining its readers as well as informing them, the Communist press can only lecture and sermonize.

The favorite subject is, of course, Chairman Mao. During the height of the Cultural Revolution the NCNA was filled with articles on how the people of Mozambique, Southern Chile or the Soviet Union adored Chairman Mao. Of late, the number of such articles has decreased but an occasional gem still manages to cross the wire. One such collector's item appeared during a recent Sino-Soviet border dispute entitled "Oh, Chairman Mao, you are the hope of the Soviet People Exclamation (sic)." It began:

"Many revolutionary Soviet people have, with profound proletarian feelings, tried in various ways to impart to Chinese comrades how they cherish the memory of Lenin and Stalin and what boundless love and respect they cherish for Chairman Mao, the great leader of the Chinese people, and for his invincible thought."

One man who rebelled against reading such prose was Chou Yang, who unquestionably deserves to be canonized by the China Watching Community for his wisdom and courage. "If all radio programs are concerned with the support for Chairman Mao," he is alleged to have said, "nobody will listen to them." On another occasion he observed "Before doing everything one is always required to study Chairman Mao's works. I heard that in Shanghai a table tennis player had to study Chairman Mao's works to improve his skills. This is nothing but vulgarized formalism." Not surprisingly, Chou is now enjoying an early retirement from his former position as deputy director of the Communist Party's Propaganda Department. And he was, incidentally, one of the first officials to be purged in the Cultural Revolution.

Realistically speaking, no voice in Communist China could compete with the vast arsenal of the official propaganda machine. This complex organism is both diversified and dominating, producing and packaging the word of Mao in any number of shapes and sizes. Besides the NCNA and the national newspapers there are hundreds of pamphlets and several major magazines from the glossy China Pictorial to the more sedate Peking Review, an ideological bible printed in over a dozen languages for the faithful around the world. But perhaps the provincial radio broadcasts, monitored and transcribed by several organizations in the Colony, are the most informative of all the official news sources. They add depth and counterpoint to the image of China while occasionally providing an invaluable reference to the provincial perspective of Chinese political affairs.

Time after time, the provincial broadcasts have demonstrated that the provinces often react to the Peking Government directives far differently than the Peking-oriented NCNA would have its readers believe. The provincial broadcasts are nevertheless written in the same style as the NCNA, usually with much the same content, and consequently are almost as boring and tedious as anything else from the Mainland.

The only exception to this rule on Communist Chinese prose were the Red Guard newspapers, which flourished and then died during the height of the Cultural Revolution. As Tillman Durdin of the New York Times once observed, the Red Guard press came closer to being a free press than anything Communist China has ever had. Where the official press was agonizing, the Red Guard press were lively and informative. One time there might be an account of an armed battle between two rival factions in Canton or another time it might be the account of how rebels in the critical border province of Kwangsi had stopped a train bound for North Vietnam with arms for the Hanoi Government. The Red Guard papers also provided revealing transcripts of meetings in Peking between the top leaders like Chou En-lai and provincial representatives. This material along with other information published by the Red Guards provided some of the best evidence and documentation that has reached this British Crown Colony of the widespread regionalism and decentralization in China.

Understandably, the Peking Government waged a continuous campaign to stop the flow of these newspapers out to Hong Kong but until the fall of 1968 their efforts were mostly unsuccessful.

Reportedly there are about six or seven big dealers in Hong Kong who specialise in getting provincial and Red Guard newspapers out of China, but relatively few people in the China Watching Industry here know who they are and the organizations keep themselves well hidden from anyone but their regular customers - primarily the Diplomatic missions. Secrecy of course is the key factor to the success of their operations. According to various informed sources, these dealers have agents in China, primarily in the big southern Chinese city of Canton which is only 90 miles from Hong Kong, who just buy the newspapers from street vendors. Most often the newspapers would then be cut into four or five pieces that would be mailed individually and at suitable intervals to a relative in Hong Kong for collection by the dealer. But often the newspapers have been carried out of China right under the eyes of the Chinese customs and border officials, wrapped in heavy Chinese bedrolls which were rarely searched. Another route was more circuitous and dangerous. The newspapers would be brought to a town on the coast and then smuggled onto one of the Hong Kong fishing junks that call frequently at some of the neighboring Chinese ports. Once the papers (both Red Guard and provincial) arrived in Hong Kong they were put up for bids and the bids on one of two occasions reportedly went as high as \$500 - which is rather a stiff price to pay for usually no more than four pages of cheap newsprint.

There were few complaints about price when the newspaper was an authentic import from the Mainland but that was not always the case. Occasionally a dealer would try to sell a paper that had

originated from the presses of some small print shop in the neighboring Portuguese province of Macau instead of some Red Guard organization in Canton. Although in one or two instances a forgery actually became far more famous than most originals because of the ingenuity and imagination that went into producing it. First of all, the forger would have to write a story plausible enough to fool some very sharp experts and then produce a newspaper that could stand comparison with the appearance of the authentic article. The type face had to be right, of course, as did the condition of the paper which would have to be artificially aged (usually by crumpling it up several times) to simulate the wear and tear on the average Red Guard paper reaching Hong Kong.

One of the shrewdest buyers in town, and also one of the biggest, is the U.S. Consulate which serves as the major clearing house of Communist documents for the entire China Watching community. Through a series of three different publications, the Consulate makes available translations of most major Communist newspapers and official news agency articles. And when the Red Guard presses were still rolling, the Consulate translations were the major source for those documents as well. All in all, these publications consistently offer so much exclusive material that they have become one of the most popular sources of information to members of the international fraternity. The principal publication, the Survey of the China Mainland Press, is issued about four times a week and contains the latest material, while the Survey of China Mainland Magazines and the Current Background offer collections of documents usually on a

single subject, such as the most recent series of Chinese attacks on the United States or the Soviet Union.

Reading through the mass of Communist documents takes the patience of a Talmudist, the instincts of a detective and the endurance of an archeologist. The exercise is so demanding, frustrating and tedious that it literally requires an almost religious devotion. Stanley Karnow of the Washington Post describes it as "a process of total immersion." "It is tedious and it is hard work," Karnow explains, "but there is no substitute for plodding through all this stuff. You have got to be in it. And one curious thing you discover if you go away from it for a few months: How difficult it is to get back to it. Not that you have forgotten it all, but you have got to be able to get yourself back into the rhythm of the whole thing. It's a special kind of discipline. You are just soaked in it all the time and that way you learn how to read it. There is a lot of intuition in it too. Kind of a way of life."

The objective is to dig through the trivia in search of the significant, which is occasionally to be found. Hidden in the mass of turgid prose are some hard facts, a few suggestive inferences and a handful of clues to the mysteries of China. The methodology is sometimes called "reading between the lines." And the rules of the game dictate that almost anything can be important and above all that nothing should be overlooked. During the recent Sino-Soviet border dispute, for example, the Chinese issued five consecutive statements described as "urgent protests." The sixth was worded slightly differently. The last paragraph of the Chinese Foreign

Ministry statement said that this was an "urgent and strong protest." The change in phrasing obviously reflected increasing Chinese anger over the alleged Russian intrusions onto a disputed island along their common border in Manchuria.

This type of textual analysis has been used repeatedly to plot with great precision the ever-increasing rift between China and her Communist neighbors to the south, North Vietnam and the Vietcong. China's anger at her neighbors has been so great in the past year that Peking refused to acknowledge the existence of the Paris Talks until October 19 when the NCNA solemnly announced the opening of the Talks - six months after the fact!

For the next two months after that acknowledgement it almost seemed as if the rift was beginning to heal. But on December 19, 1968 the Chinese totally destroyed that impression in their annual message to the Vietcong on the anniversary of their founding. The 1968 message was signed not only by Mao Tse-tung but also by Lin Piao and Premier Chou En-lai, a very significant change as pointed out by John Gittings writing in a local Hong Kong newspaper.

"It can readily be established that Peking continues to refrain from the tactless argument that the 'Vietnamese people love Chairman Mao' and that he is the real author of their achievements. Thus, in 1967, China's message of congratulations to the NLF had been signed by Mao alone; in 1968 he was joined by Lin Piao and Chou En-lai."

Nevertheless, as Gittings noted, the rest of the message was just as uncompromising and critical of the North Vietnamese position as any of the other Chinese statements in previous months.

"The Mao message of 1967 had ended with a resounding pledge of Chinese support. 'We firmly support you,' said Mao. 'We are neighboring countries as closely related as the lips and teeth.' Your struggle, he continued, is our struggle and China provides a 'powerful backing' for you.

"Yes last month's joint message from Mao, Lin and Chou merely stated that the Chinese people 'resolutely support' the people of Vietnam and left it at that. Not a very encouraging accolade for the NLF, we may think.

By this method of analysis, China Watchers were able to place into its proper perspective a message that was described by the Peking Review as a "warm" greeting, but which was actually a terse reminder to the Vietcong and Hanoi that the Chinese leadership was not amused by their activities in Paris.

Probably no other city in the world provides such an ideal environment for this type of political detective work. The freedom and opportunity to snoop, eavesdrop, investigate and detect in Hong Kong could not be duplicated in any other city in Asia. Much of the credit for this must naturally go to the history, geography and politics but above all to the almost unique national character of the British. For all their other faults, the British do have a few outstanding virtues that make them the ideal rulers of Hong Kong: They are more pragmatic than idealistic, more realistic than romantic. They may not even be very honest or intelligent but they are certainly shrewd and clever. And whatever they may have done to their homeland, they have at least discovered the formula for success and prosperity as benevolent dictators in Asia.

Had the United States controlled this Colony, for example, the situation might be quite different today. Either China would no longer be Communist or Hong Kong would no longer be American. One or the other would most probably have had to submit to the will of the other for it is rather doubtful whether the United States and China could exist side by side. The British, on the other hand, seem to have accepted the political realities of their situation as colonialists, existing at the mercy of the Communists, totally realistically. To be sure, some may find the British colonial administration obnoxious and decadent, but the Communist Chinese evidently find them tolerable (or just barely so for the moment) and this is clearly the decisive factor.

The genius of the British in Hong Kong has been their willingness to offer a haven and refuge to the unwanted and homeless of the world. Ousted from its natural habitat, the China Watching community was inevitably attracted to the Colony while at the same time clinging to the hope that Hong Kong would only be a temporary residence during a brief exile. The Community is still in exile but in the meantime it has grown and prospered by exploiting the Colony's natural assets as a political observation station developing in the process many of the characteristics of an academic community. "This is like a college campus," Stanley Karnow observed, "with everyone studying the same subject on different levels. We are all here together. We all play poker together, go swimming together, to the same parties and so forth. We also talk about China all the time, or a lot of the time. All of us belong to the same guild, and so we are always exchanging information and ideas.

If the analogy to a college campus is appropriate, and it would seem to be, then the U.S. Consulate undoubtedly represents the post-graduate department with the dons of the faculty on the fourth floor where Harold Jacobson maintains his office. First impressions of Jacobson are sometimes deceiving; his physical appearance fits the popular image of a wealthy, slightly overweight mid-western businessman, but he is actually a scholarly Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He is also by general acknowledgement one of the best China Watchers around today, setting the pace for a staff of analysts that has a startling amount of expertise and background in Chinese affairs. Almost all the analysts, Jacobson included, speak Mandarin fluently to the point where it is in some aspects more familiar to them than English. Occasionally in the midst of a conversation they will simply stop in mid-breath unable to remember the English translation of a term they use daily in Chinese. And one staffer, who was once observed explaining "charley horse" in Mandarin without the least difficulty, will frequently keep muttering "shih, shih" (yes, yes - in Mandarin) in a discussion in English until he catches himself and reverts back to straight English without variations.

The heart of the Consulate operation is on the third floor where the political section occupies a long suite of offices. The function of this unit was perhaps best summed up by the very young son of one of the analysts who, when challenged by equally young friends, as to his father's occupation, proudly announced "My Daddy blows the whistle on Chairman Mao!" This young man's daddy has

about 40-50 colleagues who are involved in approximately the same activity. Besides the political observers there are also economic specialists, trade specialists, agricultural specialists, military specialists, occasionally a historian and once even a religious specialist.

Probably no other nation in the world, with the possible exception of the Soviet Union, has invested as much manpower or resources into an effort to monitor developments on the Mainland. The U.S., for example, certainly has more analysts working on China than any other western nation, and at least as many as the Soviet Union. It also has, perhaps, the most extensive collection of files on China with such items as a collection of three million cards listing the name and whatever background available on each known Chinese Communist official - past or present - from Mao Tse-tung down to the lowest levels of the bureaucracy. And this treasure chest of information is constantly being expanded by intelligence flowing in from almost anywhere on the earth or even above it - where some of the most effective China Watchers operate.

Infra-red cameras placed in the bellies of U-2 aircraft, the faster and more versatile SR-71s or the even more perceptive spy satellites have discovered some of China's most closely guarded secrets. The satellites and planes have been especially effective in photographing such sensitive areas as Lop Nor, Sinkiang where the Chinese have their main nuclear testing facilities. As their only defense against these high-flying snoopers, the Chinese have resorted to camouflage and deception according to a dispatch filed

by Frank Robertson of the London Daily Telegraph. A veteran Hong Kong hand, Robertson reported that a refugee who had visited Lop Nor shortly before fleeing the Mainland said there were five dummy installations in the same area as the real testing site "to mislead interpreters of American satellite photographs".

The British have been watching China for at least as long as the United States and their effort, while far more modest, is both competent and thorough. In some respects the British may have an even greater insight into Mainland affairs than the United States, primarily because of their access to Peking where the bulk of their political reporting on China is done. Any information collected in Peking or elsewhere is shared with the U.S. which in turn provides information received from its own exclusive sources such as the satellites or the documents smuggled out of the Mainland. This pooling of information has of course benefitted both nations considerably and at the same time continued the long tradition of Anglo-American cooperation around the world. But despite this close relationship the two nations seem to take a somewhat different attitude towards the immediate relevancy of their work. Perhaps because of its more extensive internal commitments, the United States gives the impression of feeling a greater urgency than Great Britain about developments in China, despite the absence of direct relations between Washington and Peking. This difference was especially notable in the early months of the Cultural Revolution when the Foreign Office failed to foresee the possible effects the upheaval might have on Sino-British relations. Of course by the summer of 1967, their somewhat aloof manner was undermined by the sacking of their mission in Peking and the tragic detention

of the Reuters' correspondent, Anthony Grey, who has been virtually confined to the bedroom of his house for the past two years. Washington's reaction, on the other hand, was far less restrained as an avalanche of cables descended on the Consulate demanding more and more information and analysis, particularly on the Cultural Revolution's probable effects on Chinese policy in Southeast Asia.

Comparing diplomatic operations may be fair game, but trying to judge the diplomats and the journalists by the same standards simply will not work because the two groups work on different levels. With all the information and manpower at their disposal the diplomatic operations are able to probe far more deeply and thoroughly than the press corps, while the individual analysts develop an expertise that most of the journalists simply cannot match. But there are some who say that the diplomatic operations are too absorbed in the daily affairs on the Mainland to pay sufficient attention to the more significant long-term trends, and this has consequently limited their perspective and inhibited their analysis. Speaking specifically about the U.S. Consulate, one top China Watcher in the press added that "they are much too wrapped up in detail and tend to get a little too close to it. But maybe there will be changes as a lot of new personnel are here now. Although remember that the individuals who stay in the foreign services are temperamentally cautious and it is easier to do that sort of thing than to stick your neck out. A lot of people are just not inclined to make judgements, which is one of the problems of the whole thing; making any judgement in this business is not only difficult but it's

also risky and dangerous, especially for an instinctively cautious bureaucrat."

The journalists of course have their own problems but bureaucracy is mercifully only a minor one. One of the advantages of being overseas for a newspaper or network is that the bureaucracy usually has the good sense to stay quietly at home. Thus, the press has the license to take or leave China as the story and the spirit moves them. Whenever the story becomes too dull, or the urge to travel too irresistible, the journalist can escape the merciless routine and leave China to the diplomats. In November of each year there is in fact a mass exodus to Phnom-Penh for Prince Norodom Sihanouk's annual month-long monologue to foreign correspondants. Since this is the only time the press is tolerated in Cambodia, few dare risk the Prince's displeasure by not appearing on cue. Once back in the Colony, some of the group retreat to the serenity of their mountainside perches to babysit the NCNA machines, while others will go flying in search of new adventures, new datelines and new stories driven by their editors or their own sense of news. Those who remain behind work in relative isolation in submission to the tyranny of a routine that demands hours of reading and frequent contact with diplomatic and other informed sources. And with so much ~~of~~ their time committed to their work, they have had little opportunity, and in most cases little cause or inclination, to develop a personal feud with any of their colleagues. When the infrequent dispute has arisen in the past, however, the two men have simply avoided attending the same parties since the members of

the press - as a general rule - would rarely meet otherwise.

Almost all journalists engaged in this sport of matching wits with the Chinese leaders are usually counted among the aristocrats of the international press. But even in this twinkling galaxy, a few superstars have earned special recognition. Stanley Karnow of the Washington Post and Robert Elegant of the Los Angeles Times are always accorded this high distinction because of their longevity on the story, their keen insights and their great analytical talents. Invariably the two are paired together because of their common devotion to the subject and outstanding performance records, but they have never been friends and, in fact, prefer to keep their distance.

Whatever their personal differences, the two men do share a strong aversion to the popularized name of their profession. Elegant declares that the term China Watcher "makes me sick", while Karnow regards himself as a China Watcher-Watcher, a term he thinks more appropriate to his work. "I watch the China Watcher really, rather than trying to consider myself a sort of expert. I very rarely, almost never, sit down and analyze a situation without speaking to other people about it. I almost never do it on my own. I don't trust myself in my little room all alone to come through with some pretty weighty pronouncement on what is going on in China. So I keep referring to what the specialists say, what the analysts think, and this is not just a device for camouflaging my own feelings. In a sense, what I am doing, when you boil it down, is to present what this bizarre community of China Watchers thinks about situations.

But that is somewhat of an oversimplification. Karnow and Elegant are so knowledgeable on Chinese affairs that in many areas they need little guidance and background from the diplomatic analysts. This expertise is reflected in the ability of both men to focus on the most significant issues in any new statement or event and explore its possible implications for the future. Their reputations and many decorations have been earned specifically on this ability to pinpoint in sharp clear prose the essential factors in any issue. Press and academic associations awarding prizes for reporting on China frequently find themselves unable to decide on which of the two has a higher claim to an accolade.

Elegant has collected five major awards and citations since 1962 but the one prize he wants most, the Pulitzer Prize, has so far eluded him. For some time, however, Elegant has been looking beyond journalism to a fulltime career as a novelist. He has already written several novels - in addition to two works on Communist China - and his first, a thriller, received the Edgar Allan Poe special award from the Mystery Writers of America in 1967. Despite this modest success as a novelist, he remains somewhat reluctantly in journalism as the more lucrative of the two professions, at least at this stage of his career.

Journalism has obviously been very kind and generous to Elegant allowing him to lead the comfortable but busy life of a suburban squire. Both his residence and office are located in the same spacious colonial house about 15 miles from the downtown business centre in the fashionable and exclusive

Shouson Hill section of Hong Kong Island. Set on a plain of rolling hills between towering houses and small estates belonging to the wealthy and successful, Elegant's graceful residence surrounded by well-kept grounds typifies not only the affluence of this lovely and peaceful area but also the casual yet efficient pace of his daily routine. Most days will see him driving into town for a luncheon date followed perhaps by an hour or two of reading at the Country Club pool which is only a five minute drive from his home. And usually by evening he will have finished his work for the day while many of his colleagues prefer to keep working into the early hours of the morning.

His office occupies one wing of the house and is shared by Elegant with two young Chinese multilingual sisters who serve as his secretaries and the guardians of the outer chamber. The inner sanctum lies just beyond the secretaries' desks, past two curtained french doors and down three steps creating a split-level arrangement that is both comfortable and functional. This sunken office gives a feeling of isolation that makes it an ideal place for serious work, but the fascination of the work and the challenge of the job seem to have worn a little thin for Elegant who is evidently somewhat tired of the grind. Surveying the mass of papers and books in his small office Elegant declared that "What I really want to do is write novels."

China, however, has never been a passing fancy with Elegant even though he got into Chinese studies entirely by accident. As

he explains it, the whole thing started back in 1945 when he was a senior at the University of Pennsylvania and obliged to take a language course. Arabic happened to be an 8 a.m. class - which any undergrad would naturally dismiss as a barbarian hour - while Chinese was at 4 p.m. (much more civilized!). In graduate school he continued his language courses and branched out into Chinese history and civilization and of course by then he was hooked! Today his Mandarin is still fluent, his interest in Chinese history considerable and his belief even stronger that all journalists covering China should not only have some academic background in the subject but fluency in the language as well.

But at least in the matter of style there is far more of the highly polished world traveller in Elegant than the preoccupied bookish scholar. He is a witty and charming conversationalist, a perceptive observer and an amusing commentator on such diverse subjects as the intricacies of the power struggle in the Chinese leadership and the merits of the most recent crop of mystery novels. His critics, however, find him too "elegant," arrogant," even "abrasive" with a disturbing weakness for flamboyant showmanship.

This criticism has been directed at everything from his long black cigarette holder to a monocle he occasionally wears, although most often the target has been his writing. These critics accuse him of sensationalist reporting because, so they say, he frequently draws controversial conclusions from flimsy and highly questionable evidence. But as one of his colleagues in the press observed "Elegant is often wild but at least for some brilliant and imaginative reasons."

Elegant is far too complex an individual to be easily classified, categorized, praised or damned. In the final analysis he may be brilliant, imaginative and even arrogant. Beyond that, he is also known as somewhat of a "hawk." Not in the most simplistic sense, of course, but he does support the general U.S. commitment in Vietnam as opposed to most of his colleagues in Hong Kong, such as Stanley Karnow, who are critical of it. Karnow can be vehemently critical of U.S. policies in Vietnam but rarely in public and rarely with anyone besides his close friends. Those who do not know him well and who try to evaluate the man and his views from outward appearances find that he is, to use a somewhat aging vernacular, one of the coolest cats in town. In fact, there is rarely any betrayal of personal emotion that would mar the image he has acquired of being a cool, clam, unemotional, objective intellectual who functions with rare detachment and perspective; the classic example of the smooth professional operator who seems to accomplish more in one or two telephone calls than many reporters can achieve in several days of legwork.

The long list of "exclusives" that have appeared under Karnow's byline have only tended to reinforce this somewhat glorified image. Over the years Karnow has managed to file an impressive number of these exclusive stories obtained through luck, hard work and an extensive network of friends and contacts in the upper echelons of officialdom. In December 1967, Karnow even scooped the State Department with a cabled interview with Cambodian Prince Sihanouk in which the Prince said he would welcome an American envoy in Phnom-Penh to discuss the Communist sanctuaries on his

nation's territory. The interview was splashed over front pages around the world and resulted in a high-level meeting between the Prince and U.S. Ambassador Chester Bowles less than a month after the story appeared.

This journalistic coup, along with many others in the past decade, only enhanced his already formidable reputation for professional ability and integrity; a reputation that has earned him considerable respect from many very high officials who also admire and appreciate his intellectual capacity to grasp the essentials in even the most complicated situations. Karmow is not a gregarious man, however, and his personal style is crisp and authoritative, while to many people he seems withdrawn, preoccupied and perhaps abrupt: a man evidently driven by ambition and a steadfast commitment to his work. But at the same time he is not an insensitive man nor arrogant or flippant except on occasion when reporting on Southeast Asia, which he visits infrequently and somewhat reluctantly. Some of his reports from there have been criticized for being glib and uninformed, totally unlike his lucid commentaries on China, which is - after all - his major concern. There is even the suspicion that he cannot regard Southeast Asia with the same respect he lavishes on the Middle Kingdom.

Nevertheless, Karmow maintains that his chief interest is not in the Chinese people but in the story itself. However this deep intellectual interest, as opposed to the emotional involvement he disavows, developed rather late in his career. In 1947 when he left the States to begin his career as a foreign correspondent, Europe was the place to be. China was then engaged in her monumental civil war, but even by that late date the Chinese Mainland was still too distant and remote to make much of

an impact on the imaginations of the most aspiring foreign correspondents. So Karnow took off for Paris which he used as a base to roam Europe for Time Magazine, until a Nieman Fellowship to Harvard brought him back home ten years later in 1957. Karnow spent the sabbatical year studying for a new assignment in Africa, but within a year after he opened a bureau in Morocco he was packing again, this time for Hong Kong, where he acquired a new home and two new employers in succession. From Hong Kong bureau chief for Time Magazine he became a roving correspondent for the Saturday Evening Post and finally the Southeast Asian correspondent and China Watcher for the Washington Post.

His present base of operations is a simply-furnished office on Kennedy Terrace, just about a block up the hill from the U.S. Consulate. There's nothing lavish about it, proving again perhaps that most journalists, regardless of how well they are paid, instinctively feel slightly wicked and indecent working in the luxurious surroundings that business executives find so necessary for their ego and prestige. One of the few exceptions to this rule is downtown at the spacious suite of Time-Life offices where the bureau chief operates from a wood-paneled, thick carpeted chamber that would do justice to most chairmen of the board. Karnow's office, on the other hand, has a superb view of the harbour but the walls are simply lined with hundreds of books and magazines.

This modern seven-stories building on Kennedy Terrace actually has one of the highest concentrations of China Watchers

in Hong Kong outside the U.S. Consulate. With the bureaus of the Washington Post, the Baltimore Sun, Newsweek Magazine and CBS News all under this one roof, over 10,000 words of copy on China and North Vietnam will usually be filed from this address in almost any given week. Some cynics might say that China Watchers like to stick together so they can pick each other's brains, but most often they are just picking from each other's extensive files or borrowing a newly arrived magazine. In one respect, the building serves as an unofficial but accurate barometer of the political blood pressure of Asian communism. When a major decision has been announced in Peking or a significant editorial published by Hanoi the lights in all four offices will stay on through much of the night alerting anyone driving past that there has been a major development someplace between Hanoi and Pyongyang.

On such occasions Karnow seems riveted to his chair for hours on end, a portrait of intense concentration. The only sound in the office comes from the teletypes in the back room or from his own typewriter. Wirecopy is strewn recklessly over tables and chairs while his desk is cluttered with files and books he has used during the many hours it sometimes takes to research a complex story. He types methodically but slowly and carefully. The process can go on for several hours depending on whether the typewriter is cooperating that particular night. Karnow has always been a good writer but the effort required to produce smooth and polished copy often keeps him working late into the night.

One flight up are the offices of the Baltimore Sun where Peter Kumpa is usually fighting his own battle with the typewriter. On many nights when a major story has been breaking in China, both he and Karnow have worked right through till sunrise punching out their copy. Yet even during the longest of these exhausting sessions Kumpa never seems to lose either his sense of perspective or his sense of humour. In fact, Kumpa seems to approach almost anything with a touch of wit and cynicism which helps to explain why he regards Hong Kong as an agreeable assignment despite all frustrations. He also maintains that watching China from the outside is far more tolerable than watching Russia from the inside, and he speaks from experience. "You don't get as much frustration here in Hong Kong as you do in Moscow. You get frustrated here because you can't go there, but when you take the China Watching job, if you're an American, you take a vow that you are never going to see this never-never land and you have to do it from afar, barring some miracle. But in Moscow you have other kinds of frustrations: you can't see the people you really want to see. And you walk by the buildings where these people have their offices and don't get in."

There are few correspondents in Hong Kong who have covered both Russia and China. Even fewer have much experience in covering both Europe and Africa in addition to several long assignments in the Middle East. But in nine years as a foreign correspondent Kumpa has spent a good deal of time in all these areas and emerged as a member of that gradually disappearing breed of journalist who

can feel at home with almost any story in the world. Most first-rate journalists of this type, like Kumpa, also have the ability to report on a story with understanding and insight even where no great personal involvement exists. And though Kumpa admittedly cannot share the deep affection for Asia that motivates some of his colleagues, he has applied himself to the job with great personal determination and considerable success, in the style of a true professional journalist. His political analyses are invariably well-reasoned and penetrating while on occasion he will also put on a display of his talent for turning out the witty satirical and entertaining feature.

However the master of the quip and well-turned phrase in the building is on the third floor where Bernard Kalb of CBS infrequently holds court. Kalb is more accurately a Saigon-watcher but for variation (and to reacquaint himself with his family) he returns to Hong Kong about once every month where he will dash off a few hundred words on the Middle Kingdom. Because air time is a far more precious commodity than newsprint, Kalb must say his piece with about one-tenth the words available to a newspaper correspondent - something he manages to do to perfection and usually with an amusing twist - as he demonstrated recently in a piece on the Maoist cult of personality. "The most advertised man in Communist China these days," he began, "is an aging atheist who's turned himself into a religion."

The personality cult was something Kalb was first exposed to over ten years ago when he arrived in Asia to cover the former

Indonesian leader Sukarno, who had created a rather impressive cult of his own. So by virtue of this decade of experience in the region, Kalb enjoys the status and prestige of being one of the many veteran "Asian Hands" now based in Hong Kong. But almost all the members of this group rank as relative newcomers to Asia next to an old "China Hand" like Tillman Durdin of The New York Times. Durdin is one of a very small group of China Watchers who can recall from personal experience the Chinese Mainland nearly four decades ago, when the Communists were still a small rebel movement searching for support and recognition. Durdin originally left his native Texas for China in 1930 to escape the Depression. He arrived with no specific vocational objectives but in a few years he had begun a career in journalism that was to eventually take him to some of the major World War II battlefields in the Pacific Theater before leading him back to China for a last look at the Mainland and the Chinese Civil War. Until 1948 when he finally returned home, after a total of 15 years in China, Durdin was based in the Nationalist capital of Nanking covering the futile political negotiations between the two Chinese factions. The assignment gave him the opportunity to become fairly well acquainted with many of the leading Communist delegates, including Chou En-lai, who were later to assume high posts in the Peking Government. But curiously Durdin prefers to keep silent on his contacts and experiences in Nanking partly, it would seem, out of a strong inclination towards taciturnity. Although he has often been called the best correspondent in Asia, many of his old friends and long-

time colleagues feel that his reporting - as good as it is - could be even better if he would only overcome much of his instinctive reserve and diffidence.

Yet at times Durdin can be a very outspoken man especially on the difficulties of covering China from the outside or on the attractions of Asia. "I like Asia rather than Europe or Africa because here cultures are both exotic and different and appeal to me more than those that are western and familiar. I have worked short spells in Europe and I find the Europeans too much like us - they are predictable!" He also found life at the Times' headquarters in New York equally uninspiring as compared to the excitement and stimulation of a "live" story - which is one reason he is somewhat unhappy in Hong Kong. "I like covering China and normally if you can get at China and the Chinese people it is fun. They are a fascinating people, intriguing in some ways. Above all, they are productive and numerous, big and important. But this Hong Kong drive is pretty dismal. This constant reading and guessing; I prefer to cover stories that involve human beings that you can see and talk to. I get tired of this research drive and it's so burdensome. You can read yourself blind and still not have ready everything that you ought to. I feel that the China Watchers are generally doing a good job. But while a lot of them may think they know what's going on, I don't think a lot of them really do."

Most reporters of Durdin's generation have now reconciled themselves to an editor's chair or an easy, physically undemanding assignment in Washington or New York. But Durdin is a man of

amazing vitality and energy, constantly shifting between his desk in The Time's Bureau in Hong Kong and assignments in Taiwan, the Philippines, Cambodia or elsewhere in Asia. The Times has the largest bureau in Hong Kong so Durdin can get away fairly frequently while either Bureau Chief Charles Mohr, who spends most of his time in Vietnam, or Ian Stewart is doing the honors on the China Story. But once back in Hong Kong, Durdin becomes yet another of the night-workers in the press corps. By midnight the light from his office is usually brightening up the harbor skyline and if it isn't, so the word here goes, "Till" Durdin is still at his poker game.

At just about this same time one of the most dedicated and elusive of the China Watchers, Father LaDany, is burning off his shortwave radio after an evening of monitoring the Chinese provincial broadcasting stations. There is an old joke that circulates around Hong Kong to the effect that it is virtually impossible to get LaDany to a dinner party because he will not break away from his evening monitoring duties. Over the past few decades, in fact, this aging Jesuit missionary has followed Chinese affairs both from inside the country and from Hong Kong with a devotion and commitment rare even among professional China scholars. Perhaps the best description of LaDany was written inadvertently by LaDany himself in a recent issue of his weekly newsletter, China News Analysis. Speaking in general terms he wrote that "There are two kinds of writers on China, those who study all the material available and those who take a more forthright attitude. The latter write about China with ease, the former bite their pens and wonder what to say."

Needless to say LaDany is one of the latter but he is also much more. He is a man who has fallen totally, unmistakeably and irrevocably in love with China, a fact evident on almost every page of his well-written and scholarly newsletter. A recent issue provided an excellent example of this. In writing about the political activities of the soldiers in the Chinese Army he declared, in almost a confession of his profound interest in all aspects of the China spectacle, "One wants to know not only what they do, but what they are, how they are being treated, how they behave." He also applies himself to the task of converting others to his interest in China with the same zeal that he devotes to the study of China itself. He publishes a Spanish edition for Latin American countries, and a Chinese language broadcast monitoring service for those, he said, who do not want to miss the authentic "flavor" of the broadcasts. He is even in the process of trying to tell the overseas Chinese in the West about their homeland by publishing an edition in Chinese.

In fact nothing seems to escape his interest nor is he too much of the expert to explain the intricacies of China Watching to those readers who are not specialists. His style of writing has a slight pedantic touch to it in the spirit of a teacher telling his students "But see the mystery and the wonder of it all...." Explaining a passage in a provincial newspaper, for example, he wrote that "This tells us clearly that the true attitude towards the Policy, the order of Peking, should be, and what is meant, at least here, by 'rightist opportunism'." Further on in this issue of the newsletter writing in much the same spirit as a biblical exegete he discusses the latest reports on the mass organizations

in China that were so active during the Cultural Revolution but have since reportedly lost much of their vigor. Then he adds in a characteristic aside reflecting what seems to be his joy in discovering every new little fact "We did not know that these mass organizations were still so much alive."

Perhaps the greatest tribute to LaDany's abilities have come from the handful of Communist officials who subscribe to his newsletter, although they are not the only specialists who read his reports faithfully each week. Many analysts in Hong Kong have found that there are few men anywhere who can match LaDany's versatility and expertise in so many aspects of the situation in China. Speaking fluent Mandarin (in addition to English, French, Latin and his native Hungarian), he indeed seems to read everything and appears to be interested in almost everything from the misty policies of the top echelons of the Peking Government to the production of coal and even to the state of art inside China.

Not quite as scholarly as LaDany but almost as comprehensive is the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review. Concentrating heavily on politics and economics, the Review serves in many respects as the weekly magazine of Asia. Its coverage of India, Indonesia, and of course China, which is its specialty, is frequently excellent. What makes this achievement so impressive is that the Review operates from admittedly limited resources which occasionally puts the magazine in the position of relying on second or third-rate journalists who are often more intent on hawking their own point of view than getting their facts straight.

The Review itself seems unable at times to resist the temptation of blatantly expressing its anti-American feelings - often in the crudest fashion. Its coverage of the Vietnam War has consequently been mostly one-sided while its stringer-correspondent at the Paris Talks has never tried to conceal her own sympathies.

But there is nothing that is second-rate about its coverage of China. Its stable of China Watchers is led by a young Englishman named John Gittings who is probably the only China scholar in the world today who can claim to have watched China from the University of Santiago in Chile, where he recently spent a year simply because he wanted to see South America. Gittings is also the author of two well-received books on China and most importantly, perhaps, he has that combination of patience and ability that enables him to keep writing well-balanced and usually perceptive analytical pieces on China week after week.

The quality of the magazine's reportage, so unquestionably high in certain areas such as China, is largely a testimony to the talents of its editor Derek Davies, a very personable and learned man with a delightful sense of humor and an engaging pen. In the five years he has been editor, Davies has vigourously attacked complacency, challenged hallowed convention and tried in his own way to eliminate injustice and inefficiency in the Hong Kong Government. And even though the Review is owned by some of the financial giants of the Hong Kong business establishment, Davies has carved out a unique position for himself as a progressive and pioneering editor.

When no one else could or would talk with the local Communists, Davies began a constructive dialogue with them on a local television station. The effort on television never really succeeded because of official censorship which has through the years stifled much of the local press. Since the 1967 riots, however, the local papers have become far more outspoken in their demands for better conditions and this development must be credited, at least in part, to Davies' admirable efforts.

Davies is also a member of a small elite group of journalists now based in Hong Kong who have seen China since the Communist takeover. The American colleagues, who cannot get in for obvious reasons, are naturally envious although they recognize that China can be a forbidding country for a Westerner even in the best of times. Journalists who have been there, sometimes for just a few weeks, have described it as a grotesque reflection of the world they owed allegiance to. CBS News Correspondent Morley Safer cabled his New York office on emerging from a tour of Peking and several other cities in July 1967 "Have just stepped through the Looking Glass after twenty day nightmare." Frederick Nossal spent eight months in China during the 1959-60 period as the correspondent for the Toronto Globe & Mail and says he found that the only antidote to the constant attacks of depression was a steady stream of mail from his family and his editors. "It seemed that I was on another planet; that I was an earthling entering the society of another planet. The people were very nice to you, but the relationship lacked any sense of human warmth and if no mail from the newspaper or family arrived on one particular day I was totally depressed."

For other foreigners in Peking - visiting correspondents or businessmen - the city was even more oppressive. "I remember one correspondent," Nossal says, "who began talking to himself in the mirror while shaving after his first nine days in the rarified ideological atmosphere in Peking." Nossal is now based in Hong Kong for the Toronto Telegram where he spends part of his time covering China from a beautiful spacious house just below the Peak on Hong Kong island that boasts a spectacular view of the harbor. In Peking he worked out of two fairly small rooms in the austere Hsin Chiao Hotel but today he does much of his work from a living-room which is a large and comfortably-furnished affair, lacking only a fireplace to give it the warm and cosy feel of a mountain lodge. Nevertheless he would still be perfectly happy to exchange his present surroundings for the two hotel rooms in Peking.

Along with many of his colleagues who have worked in Peking, Nossal firmly believes that a trip to China affords some unique insights into Chinese life that are practically impossible to get in Hong Kong. "The press is missing countless human interest stories going on in China. And the greatest weakness of the China Watching Press Corps in Hong Kong is that we forget that China is made up of 700 million people who live out their lives with the same basic desires that we do." One of Hong Kong's old China hands and also one of its best writers, Richard Hughes of the London Sunday Times, toured China for six months in 1957 and came away with the same reactions to Hong Kong's limitations as a listening post. Hughes looks like an Australian version of Nero Wolfe but

unlike the great detective he gets around more. And on one of his reconnaissance missions in Peking his guide took him to what passed for the local pub where everyone sat around drinking Tsingtao beer (the local brand), gossiping and even doing a little gambling. This experience along with many others he had on the trip left Hughes more than ever convinced that the Communist rulers of China will never be able to break the Chinese of their love for either money, gambling or women.

Mark Gayn, the veteran Hong Kong correspondent of The Toronto Star, had both a professional and a personal interest in returning to China. During his 1965 trip to the Mainland, Gayn set out to look for the village where he had been born, only to find it had been disbanded years before. From a professional point of view, however, the trip was far more successful. Of all the correspondents in Hong Kong, Gayn is probably the greatest supporter of the airline industry, circling the globe two or three times every year in what seems to be a one-man campaign against inertia. And wherever he goes he is always working, always writing, always moving and even the Chinese were apparently not able to slow his pace down by much. He concentrated his travels on the northern provinces, bringing back impressions of China that would later make the Cultural Revolution far more comprehensible.

One of Chairman Mao's major objectives has been the complete elimination of the growing trend in the Chinese bureaucracy towards the development of an elite class, aloof and insensitive to the cares of the masses. Gayn had a rare glimpse of the bureaucrat that Mao so bitterly despises, during an evening he spent with the

mayor of a northern Chinese city. "The mayor held a private banquet for me in a hotel and in the course of the meal he asked if I would like to go to the theatre. I said yes but by 8 p.m. when he gave no indication of being ready to move I began to wonder. Then 8.30 slipped by. At 9.00 p.m. we finally left arriving at the theatre about half an hour later. As we entered the theatre the entire audience got up, and I later learned the entire performance had been delayed to suit the convenience of the mayor. As soon as the curtain went down for the first intermission people started getting out of their seats but the ushers battered them down until the mayor and I had walked out. And during the final act a tremendous downpour started so when the play was over the audience started to rush out for the few taxis available as there were no buses or pedicabs at that hour. But again the ushers pushed and shoved and battered everyone down until we got into the car. I was shocked."

There have been few journalists in recent times who have seen as much of China as Gayn, or who have talked at such great length with so many of the men who now rule the Mainland. The only other writer who comes immediately to mind is Edgar Snow who made his famous Journey to the Communist headquarters in 1936. Eleven years later in 1947, Gayn set out on a similar pilgrimage to Yen-an where he went from cave to cave interviewing all the major figures in the Communist movement (using the Mandarin he had learned during his childhood in China). The interviews ran on and on (very much

like this infernal piece) sometimes for ten hours, sometimes for fourteen hours as he and Mao or Lin Piao or Chou En-lai sat shivering in the winter cold speaking of China and the Communist struggle.

His most unforgettable interview was, of course, with Mao Tse-tung. He has vividly recalled that experience in a recent article (The China Reader - Communist China, New York, 1961, p.92), that will eventually be incorporated into a book he is writing on his month-long visit to Yen-an.

"We sat in a cave, Mao Tse-tung and I, and we were arguing about the state of the United States' economy.

"There may be a strong touch of unreality to this scene, but the time was 1947 and the place was Yen-an and the unreal was commonplace. In a few weeks, Yen-an would fall to the Nationalists, encamped just the other side of the mountains... But from this improbable capital Mao and his companions still governed more people than there were in France and Britain put together; still debated doctrinal matters; still attended theater plays and held weekly dances at the Party headquarters; and still received the infrequent visitor."

Access to China's leaders and to China itself has been steadily decreasing for Western observers since the Communist take-over two decades ago. In the past year or two, in fact, the number of journalists admitted to the country has dwindled to a mere handful and they have been confined, for the most part, to infrequent interviews with relatively low-level officials in either Peking or Canton. This serious shortage of reliable and objective first-hand reports on China has forced those watching China from the outside to rely even more on the arid prose of the Chinese

propaganda machine. With this highly biased material as their main source of information, China specialists are, in many cases, somewhat skeptical of the accuracy of their analyses and interpretations. This has tended to make the China Watchers a fairly humble group who recognize that since China is such a vast, ambiguous and complex subject, no one has a monopoly on wisdom or knowledge - least of all anyone who claims to know something about Mainland affairs. And with the gap between knowledge and ignorance as large as it is, they have come to regard humility not only as a virtue but as a necessity for their own self-protection.

China Watching is after all a game of wits between two groups on opposite sides of the fence. The only problem is that the fellow on the other side of the fence has a tremendous advantage: he can always build the fence a little higher, any time he so desires. Or to put it in more concrete terms as a distinguished diplomatic China Watcher recently did: "One is forced to draw inferences from the very flimsiest of evidence." Karnow, however points out that the outside world probably knows more about China than it does about much of Southeast Asia. "There are studies on the Chinese legal system, the sociology of some of her cities, village administration, military thinking and so on. But I don't think we have anywhere near this amount of information on some of the countries we're committed to in Southeast Asia." Nevertheless, John Hughes of the Christian Science Monitor maintains that there is still too little information about Chinese affairs. "But honestly

we don't know what is going on in China and in honest reporting we should make clear our doubts. If we were covering China under the best of conditions it would still be a very complicated story. I am very suspicious of people who are emphatic and supremely confident that they have got the whole picture. It is extremely difficult to have the whole picture under the conditions that we operate."

This could well be the case even if the Communists were not running the Mainland. Secrecy and ambiguity (in addition to an instinctive mistrust of all overly curious foreigners) has long been a way of life in Asia, and especially in China, rather than a convenient and familiar expedient. Almost without exception, the Oriental mind seems to rebel against precision and worship subtlety and deception. And Chinese Communist propaganda understandably reflects many of these characteristics. Even textual analysis when applied by the specialists will only establish, in most cases, what the Chinese are saying but not why they are saying it. In fact, some official Chinese statements, particularly on domestic affairs, are often so vague and misleading that they are immune to the techniques of textual analysis. At any rate, these techniques are basically useful only at a superficial level and in most cases cannot help pinpointing the actual objective or motivations behind most of Peking's actions. Therefore deduction, intuition and speculation inevitably play a major role in the interpretation of Chinese affairs. And just as inevitably this often leads to great differences of opinion on certain issues or documents even though these contradictory conclusions are based on exactly the same evidence. The China Watching community, for example, has never been able to agree on a common definition of the Cultural Revolution, for the simple reason that the Maoists themselves have never really offered one of their own. This has resulted in a dispute between some observers who maintain that

the Cultural Revolution is over - despite the lack of any official statement to that effect from Peking - and those who feel that the Cultural Revolution is still going on, although in a modified and non-violent form.

Another interpretational dispute occurred when everyone sat down to analyse a major editorial that appeared in the official Party newspaper, the People's Daily, on October 15, 1968. Among other things the editorial was noteworthy for leading off with one of Mao's more poetic instructions. "A human being has arteries and veins and his heart makes the blood circulate! one breathes through the lungs, exhaling carbon dioxide and inhaling oxygen afresh, that is, getting rid of the waste and letting in the fresh. A proletarian party must also get rid of the waste and let in the fresh for only in this way can it be full of vigour." This was the introduction to a major discussion of the re-invigoration of the Chinese Communist Party and the new Party organs, the Revolutionary Committees, with "proletarian new blood."

To some reporters, like Peter Kump and Stan Karnow, the editorial read like an attack on the leadership of the Revolutionary Committees and an admission that many of the bureaucrats Mao had been trying to purge during the Cultural Revolution were still clinging to power. In his dispatch, Kump wrote:

"Communist China's ultra-Maoist leadership has formally called for political attack on many if not most of the Revolutionary Committees fully organized just over a month ago to run the country in Mao Tse-tung's name."

Stan Karnow's piece said much the same thing:

"In an apparent crack at the provincial committees, which are mostly composed of officers and party hacks, the editorial castigated them for failing to include 'proletarian new blood' and suggested that they might 'let double-dealers and careerists sneak into the Party'."

But in the weekly issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review, their top China Watcher John Gittings maintained that the document

was a confirmation of the power and position of the present leadership of the Revolutionary Committees.

"Who then will perform the magical role of resuscitating the Party and of deciding its future membership? There is no nonsense about popular election from below... The correct procedure, according to a recent report from Kweichow, is from 'top to bottom,' and it is made clear that the Provincial Revolutionary Committee is in charge... The Leadership group is empowered (in this editorial) to reinstate or to confirm existing Party members. Whoever holds powers now is unlikely to sanction a revived Party organization which might threaten his own sources of power..."

Gittings said that later it "didn't even occur" to him that the document could be a Maoist counter-attack against the "moderates" (all terms like moderates or radicals in China Watching are of course meaningful only within the context of Chinese politics). As Gittings read it, the editorial seemed to be a clear cut rightist effort to purge the leftists and consolidate their power.

The point of this whole exercise is not that either of these two groups was wrong but that, given the ambiguity of Chinese Communist prose and political affairs, they all have a reasonable case for their argument.

But whether all this has any effect on the minds of the American public, or British public for that matter, is highly questionable at least in the minds of most of the China Watchers in Hong Kong. They are frequently haunted by the feeling that the overwhelming majority of the newspaper-reading public couldn't care less. Trips back home to the U.S. only reinforce the feeling

among members of the community here that the great majority of the American public is abysmally ignorant on Chinese affairs. In fact, Karnow often jokes that only 12 people read his stories. In more serious moments, however, he maintains that China is followed by a selected community of interested readers. "I am surprised to find the number of people who try to keep some interest in it. You know, the intelligent housewife in the suburbs of Washington or the young corporation lawyer." But John Hughes came back from a recent trip to the States with the impression that "No one in the States is really interested in China. Not the State Department and not our foreign editors. The problem of Vietnam is obsessing our attention and we shouldn't overlook the tragedy of it"

But from a historical perspective China has always been somewhat of an academic subject for the western world. Traditionally remote, hostile, isolated, introspective and xenophobic, China has consistently refused to treat the western world on equal terms. In turn, China has been belittled, humiliated and, for the most part, ignored - except in times of crisis or war. The situation is virtually the same today although there have been some changes in the basic scenario. Yet even when Red Guards went rampaging through the streets shouting vengeance to the wicked and destruction to the old, most of the world looked on with merely a morbid curiosity in the violence and hysteria that was sweeping the country.

Confronted by this awakening and partially misguided interest the China Watchers stood wedged in between trying to ex-

plain one civilization to another. They almost succeeded before much of their audience began to lose interest. Deluged with information and practically suffocated by endless propaganda, the China Watchers read and listened, analyzed and interpreted, practically to the point of exhaustion. As the Cultural Revolution aged month by month each major development was faithfully examined, dissected and reported. But at the same time the upheaval was becoming monotonous and tedious as the Communists kept saying the same things, and doing the same things, year after year. Indeed the Maoist leadership was clearly still trying to promote the same policies it had been publicizing for the past decade, and it seemed that China was hopelessly trapped on a political merry-go-round. Even the violence lost its novelty as the story gradually became a bore to much of the outside world. However unhappy they were by this discouraging reaction the China Watchers - almost at the mercy of the story - could do little but continue to report the latest political vibrations from the Mainland, however trivial and insignificant these developments may seem to an increasingly apathetic readership.

And there appears to be no escape from this cruel dilemma. The Red Guards were sensational news; the current fight for political power now going on behind closed doors in Peking is unclear, bewildering, prolonged and simply dull. Once again, China seems to be just so many words on a paper that may signify anything or possibly nothing. But this is precisely what keeps so many journalists and diplomats at their task. Of course the mystery of it all is

infuriating and maddening, but to those with a passion for this intellectual sport it is also tantalizing and enticing even though it admittedly has few rewards. But to achieve even a limited insight into this proud and stubborn nation seems to the China Watchers a sufficient incentive for what is often a frustrating and thankless endeavor.

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